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ABSTRACT

The Research and Development Exchange (RDx) is a network of eight regional educational laboratories, one university-based research and development center, and a consortium of seven state education agencies working to support state and local school improvement efforts. The RDx has four goals, designed to support dissemination and school improvement efforts: (1) to provide information, technical assistance, and/or training: (2) to promote the use of research and development outcomes: (3) to promote coordination among programs: and (4) to increase shared understanding and use of information about client needs in order to influence planning of research and development efforts. The RDx includes eight regional exchanges (Appalachia Educational Laboratory, CEMREL, Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory, Northeast Regional Exchange, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), Research for Better Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, and SWRL Educational Research and Development Laboratory), four central support services (Dissemination Support Services at NWREL: Research and Development Interpretation Service at CEMREL: Resource and Referral Service at the National Center for Research in Vocational Education: and System Support Service at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development), and the Coordinating Committee. (BW)

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Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

REGIONAL EXCHANGES OF INFORMATION THROUGH INTERMEDIATE LINKAGES AFFILIATED WITH SEAs: THE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT EXCHANGE (RDx)

by

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REGIONAL EXCHANGES OF INFORMATION THROUGH INTERMEDIATE LINKAGES AFFILIATED WITH SEAs: THE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT EXCHANGE (RDx) AND THE SEDL/REGIONAL EXCHANGE: ONE COMPONENT OF AN EMERGING EFFORT TO DISSEMINATE THE OUTCOMES OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

by

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THE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT EXCHANGE

The Research and Development Exchange (RDx) is a network of eight regional educational laboratories, one university-based r&d center, and a consortium of seven state education agencies all working to support state and local school improvement efforts. Initiated by the National Institute of Education (NIE) in 1976, the RDx is part of NIE's Dissemination and Improvement of Practice Program (DIP) (specifically, DIP's Regional Program (RP) unit). The RDx is composed of eight regional exchanges and four central support services.

The RDx has as its ultimate clients the students, teachers, and principals who attend and operate local schools. It assists these clients in their efforts to improve school practice and increase educational equity. Because of the size and complexity of these client groups and the limited resources to serve them, the RDx supports local dissemination and school improvement efforts by working through intermediary organizations. These include school districts, intermediate service agencies, state education agencies, and national education associations. Currently the RDx works primarily through state education agencies' (SEAs) dissemination and school improvement staffs.

The Need for the RDx

Among the problems now facing schools are declining enrollment, depressed student achievement scores, shrinking financial support, and violence and vandalism. The response to such crises often has been to simply allocate additional resources to schools through various reforms and innovative programs.

But the 1970's have brought austere times (and apparently the 1980's show no sign of relief). Critics and reluctant taxpayers now argue that the problems facing the schools cannot be remedied just with more resources;

schools must meet their problems by more effectively and efficiently using resources already available to them.

Among the available resources is the extensive r&d base--products, programs, personnel, know-how, and other outcomes that have been developed over the last decade. This rich resource base can be mobilized and used more effectively to influence school improvement efforts. However, increased use of these r&d resources requires greater familiarity with them--knowing where they exist, how to access them, and how to evaluate, transform, and deliver them. This increased use also demands an understanding of schools' needs, constraints, and problem-solving mechanisms and processes.

Federal and state education policies now emphasize more effective delivery and use of existing products and services. A number of national, regional, and state dissemination and technical assistance networks and consortia have been established for this purpose. These networks use multiple resource bases to support practitioner clients at state, regional, and local education levels. Recently, as these networks have grown, need to coordinate their services has become apparent.

Such coordination is built on two factors: first, shared understandings of school improvement problems and of the potential of the r&d resource base to alleviate these problems; and second, a closer relationship between educational practitioners and r&d producers.

R&D producers have always been concerned with ensuring the utility of their work for school improvement, which depends on continuous practitioner involvement to develop and adapt the r&d base to meet the challenge of school improvement.

These three needs, then, underlie the development of the RDx: to maximize the use of existing resources in the solution of school involvement

problems; to coordinate multiple networks so as to impact on school improvement efforts; and to forge a closer relationship between r&d producers and practitioners.

The RDx Goals and Operations

NIE initiated the RDx in 1976 to help practitioners use r&d resources to improve educational practice. Presented with this mission, the RDx has adopted four goal statements.

1. The RDx will provide information, technical assistance, and/or training which support dissemination and school improvement efforts.
2. The RDx will promote the use of r&d outcomes that support dissemination and school improvement efforts.
3. The RDx will promote coordination among dissemination and school improvement programs.
4. The RDx will increase shared understanding and use of information about client needs in order to influence planning of r&d efforts.

Several underlying principles govern the operation of the RDx in pursuit of these goals:

1. The RDx effort is practitioner-oriented. The needs of educational practitioners are diverse and changing. In cooperation with the client, the RDx first analyzes current situations and defines and tests alternative strategies and solutions. It does not advocate singular strategies or particular r&d outcomes as solutions.
2. The RDx effort is developmental. The organizational structure and functions of the RDx change as field realities and needs change. These changes are necessary to strengthen the operation of the RDx as a coordinated network of r&d producers and service providers.

3. The RDx is a coordinated effort. Components of the RDx work closely together to explore ways of organizing work to ensure optimal and efficient use of resources to accomplish RDx goals.

4. The RDx is a responsive network. It responds to current priorities and needs of schools. As these priorities change, and as additional resources become available, RDx priorities also change and expand.

The RDx Organization

The RDx include eight regional exchanges, four central support services, and a coordinating committee.

Regional Exchanges

Each regional exchange (Rx) delivers services to clients within an identified geographic region of the country. The services provided by the Rx include: identification and synthesis of information and resources; dissemination of research syntheses in topical areas; and technical assistance and staff development in planning and implementing school improvement programs. Each Rx operates an advisory committee of representatives from educational agencies in its region. The regional exchanges and the regions they serve are:

Appalachia Educational Laboratory - Charleston, West Virginia; Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio*, Pennsylvania*, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia.

CEMREL, Inc. - St. Louis, Missouri; Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky*, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee*, Wisconsin.

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory - Kansas City, Missouri; Colorado, Kansas, Missouri*, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming.

Northeast Regional Exchange - Chelmsford, Massachusetts; Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory - Portland, Oregon; Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington.

Research for Better Schools, Inc. - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory - Austin, Texas; Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas.

SWRL Educational Research and Development Laboratory - Los Alamitos, California; Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah.

*Several states cooperate with more than one Rx. These states are listed under both the lead and secondary (*) exchanges.

Central Support Services

The RDx central support services provide resource support for the regional exchanges. The four central services are:

Dissemination Support Services (DSS) provides training and consultation in the design and delivery of staff development and dissemination services. DSS is a program of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon.

Research and Development Interpretation Service (RDIS) synthesizes r&d outcomes and assists educational practitioners in utilizing this r&d-based knowledge in their dissemination and school improvement efforts. RDIS is a program of CEMREL, Inc., St. Louis, Missouri.

Resource and Referral Service (RRS) maintains a data base of individuals and organizations that produce, are knowledgeable about, or disseminate r&d outcomes. RRS is a program of the National Center for Research in

Vocational Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

System Support Service (SSS) assists the Coordinating Committee in its efforts to coordinate RDx operations and offers support services in documenting RDx operations. SSS is a program of the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, San Francisco, California.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee is composed of the directors of each Rx and central support service. Through the committee, the RDx works closely with the NIE to develop and implement RDx policies and to coordinate RDx activities with other federal dissemination and school improvement programs.

Meeting the RDx Goals

Since the RDx became operational in 1977 much has been accomplished. For example:

- The RDx has offered a variety of individualized technical assistance services to SEA staff responsible for dissemination and school improvement programs. A number of Rxs have provided assistance in the development of state exemplary practice files and the establishment of local program validation procedures.
- The RDx has conducted numerous regional and state workshops on topics such as using information systems, conducting needs assessment programs, training field agents, implementing innovations, selecting r&d products, and creating school improvement strategies.
- The RDx has conducted a series of "R&D Speaks" seminars. Held in each region, these seminars expose participants to carefully selected r&d products and research in reading, mathematics,

bilingual education, special education, and competency-based education.

- The RDx has selected the improvement of reading instruction as one of its priority areas. The Research and Development Interpretation Service has produced a synthesis of current research findings on teaching reading in elementary grades. The document Research Within Reach, was developed with the assistance of panels of teachers and reading researchers. The publication has been distributed to intermediary agency staff, such as SEA Right-to-Read and reading curriculum specialists. A series of seminars on the use of Research Within Reach and other reading research syntheses have been conducted by regional exchanges.
- The RDx initiated a quarterly publication, the Education R&D Report, which presents to a nationwide audience of practitioners in-depth articles and brief summaries of the results of federally funded educational r&d. Each issue usually includes reports describing the Rxs' current activities and services.
- The RDx sponsors the compilation of "mini-lists" on resource organizations working on current educational topics. Some of these mini-lists are: Resources for Financial Information for School Districts; Resources for Parent Education; Resources for Developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Handicapped Students; Resources for Assessing Student Competencies; Resources for Competency-Based High School Graduation Requirements; and Resources for Metric Education.
- Several Rxs have developed depositories of r&d products and information about these products. Depository materials are loaned to clients upon request.

- Several Rxs are organizing regional dissemination forums for dissemination staff and service providers to share perceptions of regional school improvement needs; exchange information about current operations and services; explore collaborative activities; and help build a national dissemination and school improvement agenda.

Obtaining RDx Services

Groups or individuals desiring RDx services should contact the Rx in their region through their SEA contact person, usually the staff member responsible for SEA dissemination activities. Clients may also contact the regional exchange director. Each Rx can put clients in touch with the central support services.

Regional Exchanges and Support Services

AEL Regional Exchange; Jack Sanders, regional exchange director

Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
Post Office Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325
(304) 347-0420

Midwest Regional Exchange; Carol Thomas, regional exchange director

CEMREL, Inc.
3120 59th Street
St. Louis, Missouri 63139
(314) 781-2900

McREL Regional Exchange; Susan Everson, regional exchange director

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory
4709 Belleview Avenue
Kansas City, Missouri 64112
(816) 756-2401

Northeast Regional Exchange
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Resource and Referral Service: John Peterson, RRS director

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